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How a Woman Keeps a Secret

Frank Dumont

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY



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How a Woman Keeps --- a Secret

A Comedy in One Act

BY

FRANK DUMONT

Author of "SMYTHE vs. SMITH," "SI SLOCUM'S
COUNTRY STORE," etc.



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How a Woman Keeps a Secret

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MABEL SWEETLY	. . .	<i>Whose engagement is the secret</i>
MAUDE HARRISON	<i>Her bosom friend</i>
MARY MORTON	<i>Who is giving a tea</i>
DELIA	<i>The waitress</i>
CLARA LEWIS	}	. . <i>Girls who are sure they can keep a secret</i>
STELLA GARDINER		
HAZEL BROWN		
NELLIE ATHERTON		
MARION CARR		
JESSIE COOPER		

TIME OF PLAYING :—Thirty minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Mabel Sweetly has just become engaged to Harold, but it's "the deepest kind of a secret." Before announcing it they must win the approval of Harold's uncle, now in Europe, or lose a possible ten thousand a year. At a tea Mabel meets Maude, her dearest friend. Maude sees Mabel has a secret. "Oh, do tell me. I'll never breathe it to a single soul." Mabel tells her. In spite of her promise Maude lets out the secret in a few minutes to another friend, Clara. "I can't help it if you guessed it, can I?" Clara solemnly promises not to tell, but somehow Stella coaxes the secret out of her. "If people are engaged it's perfectly silly of them not to tell, isn't it?" Stella says a secret with her is as safe as locked up in the grave. Delia, the waitress, overhears. "You mustn't tell, Delia." "Do I look like a girl as would tell other people's secrets, mum?"

But she can't keep it from Mary, her mistress. Mary hates to tell the secret, but Hazel, Nellie and the other girls are too much for her. They surround Mabel excitedly, congratulating her. "Why, I never told a living soul!" "You mustn't tell any one, girls." They all promise. But Harold calls her on the 'phone to say his uncle has returned unexpectedly, has been told, and it's all right.

"You may tell any one now, girls!" "It's no longer a secret."

COSTUMES

Costumes modern, and suitable for an afternoon tea. Mary wears an evening gown, and she, Hazel and Jessie wear no hats. Clara's hat has feathers. Delia wears waitress's cap and apron. Clara is rather boyish in manner. Jessie lisps.

PROPERTIES

Tray, with cups and dishes for Delia. Gloves and handkerchief for Stella. Handkerchiefs for Maude and Mabel.

How a Woman Keeps a Secret

SCENE.—*A handsome interior in MARY MORTON'S house. The room is a small parlor or music room, adjoining the larger drawing-room, reached by door up R. Entrances also up L. and down L., the latter leading to front door. There should be a chair and table up C., a sofa down R., and chairs down L. Other furnishings to suit taste. An afternoon tea is in progress in the drawing-room, R. Music for opening of scene, and as curtain rises a burst of laughter is heard and a clapping of hands as if some story or joke had just ended. Great buzz of conversation off R.*

(Enter DELIA, R., her hands full of dishes.)

DELIA (*pausing C.*). Och, did yez ever hear the like? Ain't it the hen party, though? An' ivery wan tellin' all she knows as quick as she can for fear some one else'll beat her to it. Sure, I pity their friends that ain't here. (*Goes L.*)

(Enter MARY, R.)

MARY: Oh, Delia, tell Johnson to send up more ices and cake at once.

DELIA. Yes, ma'am!

MARY. And bring some more teacups and saucers.

DELIA. Yes, ma'am!

(Exits up L.)

(Enter MAUDE HARRISON, down L.)

MAUDE. Oh! Mary! (*They kiss each other.*) I know that I am late—but really I hurried as much as possible!

MARY. I know it, dear. Don't go up-stairs. Take off your wraps right here.

(MAUDE removes hat, etc., which she places on table.)

MAUDE. I'm just dying for a cup of tea.

MARY. Well, you are just in time. Go right in!

(*Ushers MAUDE off R., and the girls are heard to welcome MAUDE.*)

(*Enter MABEL SWEETLY, down L.*)

MABEL. Oh, I'm afraid to go in there. (*Looks R.*) I just know they'll get it out of me. Do I look too happy? (*Smiles in mirror L.*) Of course I do. Grinning like a chessy cat. Silly! (*Pulls a long face.*) There, that's better. I promised Harold I wouldn't tell, and I won't, I won't! (*Looks again in mirror up L. Enter MAUDE, R.*) Now, mum's the word!

MAUDE. Oh, Mabel, is it you? (*MABEL looks grave.*) Mercy, what's the matter?

MABEL. Why, nothing. (*Still very grave.*)

MAUDE. Well, then, don't look at me that way.

MABEL. What way?

MAUDE. Why, that solemn way. You look like a funeral. What's the matter?

MABEL (*bursting into laughter; she kisses MAUDE*). Nothing, you dear old goose.

(*Hugs MAUDE, and gives a little gay skip, and then remembers and is solemn again.*)

MAUDE (*staring at her*). Mabel Sweetly, something is the matter with you!

MABEL (*pretending to misunderstand*). Mercy, is it my hat, or my hair? (*Goes to mirror.*)

MAUDE. You can't fool me. Why are you so late?

MABEL. Late! Why—I didn't expect to come at all.

MAUDE. Where have you been?

MABEL. Why, nowhere!

MAUDE (*scornfully*). Nowhere! Whom were you with when you were nowhere?

MABEL (*grinning in spite of herself*). With nobody.

MAUDE. Well, maybe that's what you call him.

MABEL (*hastily*). Call whom?

MAUDE. Harold Wright. Stella saw you driving with him.

MABEL. I never — Well, what if I was?

MAUDE. Oh, nothing. But you're acting queer; you know you are.

(DELIA enters L., carrying tray of cups, etc. She passes across back very slowly, and evidently listening hard.)

MABEL. I'm not!

MAUDE. You are! You have a secret. (Exit DELIA, R.) Oh, do tell me! I'll never breathe it to a single soul.

MABEL (confused). Oh, Maude!

MAUDE (determined). Come; out with it.

MABEL. Oh, dear, no; I can't tell. I mean there isn't anything.

MAUDE (triumphantly). You can't tell! Well, you just will tell me. Now!

MABEL (seriously). Maudie, you know I'd tell you first, if I could. But this is so serious—and it affects some one else. So I couldn't, honorably, could I?

MAUDE. Oh, Mabel, to think you hesitate to trust me, your very best friend!

(DELIA enters R., hastily, with empty tray and crosses very slowly, listening.)

MABEL. Oh, Maude, you know I'd trust you with any secret of mine.

MAUDE. No, you have no confidence in me. What's the use of being bosom friends if we can't confide in one another? I'd tell you anything! (Wipes her eyes.)

DELIA (aside). She'll get it out of her.

(Exits L., slowly.)

MABEL. I know you would. But this isn't my secret. Let's not talk about it.

MAUDE. I promise never to tell a single soul.

MABEL. Please, Maude——

MAUDE. Don't you believe I mean it when I say I'll never tell?

MABEL. Yes, but this is such a great secret, and so much harm might be done if it got out. I promised Harold—oh, dear—I don't mean that!

(Enter DELIA hastily, L., with tray. She crosses very slowly, listening as before.)

MAUDE. Harold! Harold! I knew it. (*Impressively.*) Mabel Sweetly, you are engaged to Harold Wright—don't deny it!

MABEL. Why, Maude, how ridiculous! (*Looks at MAUDE and gives it up.* MABEL *rushes at MAUDE suddenly and hugs her.*) Oh, Maude, it's no use trying to keep it from you. It's true!

(DELIA, *who has stopped and is listening open-mouthed, gives a sudden gasp, and hurries out R.*)

MAUDE (*triumphantly*). I knew it all the time!

MABEL. Of course you did. You guessed it, didn't you? I promised I wouldn't tell, and I haven't, have I?

MAUDE (*loyally*). Certainly not. Oh, you dear thing!

(*They embrace again.*)

MABEL. Of course you had to know it. But, Maude, promise—promise me that you won't tell a single living soul until I say so.

MAUDE. I won't. I'd rather have my tongue cut out than tell it.

MABEL. On your word and honor?

MAUDE. Cross my heart! But why can't it be announced?

MABEL. Why, because Harold's Uncle George must give his consent first, or Harold will lose twenty thousand dollars a year. His uncle would flare up and perhaps disinherit him.

MAUDE. I see. The horrid old thing.

MABEL. Oh, no, he's rather a nice old gentleman, but fond of his own way. He's in Europe now; but he's coming back in two weeks. Until then—silence; absolute, imperative silence. Don't even hint to any one, will you?

MAUDE. I'm dumb as an oyster.

MABEL. You know what these girls are at a tea. If they ever got an inkling of it —

MAUDE. I wouldn't trust one of them. Depend upon me to guard your secret. Now go in and I'll join you presently. I want to fix my hat.

MABEL (*going R.*). Yes, I must go in. Wait for me. We'll go home together, and I'll tell you everything. Now don't forget! (*Finger on lips.*)

MAUDE. I'm a sealed tomb! (*Goes to mirror and ad-*

justs hat; then comes down c. Looks R.) Just think what they'd say in there if they knew! Oh, I'm just crazy to tell them. But I mustn't even hint. Let me see—I must be especially careful with Stella, and with Clara Lewis, if she comes. She's so awfully quick to see things. (*Turns L.*) Oh, there she is now.

(*Enter CLARA LEWIS, L.*)

CLARA. Oh! Maude!

MAUDE. Why, Clara! (*They kiss and examine each other's hats.*) Why, what a pretty hat, and so becoming to you. Did you trim it yourself?

CLARA. Oh, no—I bought it just as you see it.

MAUDE. Feathers are becoming very cheap—but yours look very nice indeed. Did you have them dyed and curled?

CLARA. These are new feathers.

MAUDE. Why, so they are!

CLARA. Your hat is very pretty indeed! I had one just like it last year.

MAUDE. Last year? Oh, no, dear. Why, my milliner told me they had just arrived from Paris.

CLARA. Oh! They'll tell you anything to make a sale—but it's a pretty hat, and you look very well in it.

MAUDE. Yours is certainly becoming. It makes you look real young.

CLARA (*laughing*). Well, I really felt when I put it on I was going to make a hit, and I did. The first man I met was that old funeral-faced Harold Wright, and he grinned like a man finding money.

MAUDE. Yes, I guess he has the smile that won't come off to-day.

CLARA. Won't come off? What do you mean?

MAUDE (*hastily*). Oh, nothing. (*Moves R.*) Come on, are you going in?

CLARA (*looking at MAUDE sharply, and then running and catching her by the arm*). Maude Harrison, you know something you're trying to hide.

MAUDE. I'm not hiding anything.

CLARA (*dryly*). No, that's true. It sticks out all over you. (*Shrewdly*.) Promised not to tell, didn't you?

MAUDE. Why, you mean thing. (*Earnestly*.) Of course if I had, I wouldn't, would I?

CLARA. Dear me, how serious. There must be something in it. Let me see —

MAUDE (*alarmed*). Oh, Clara, you mustn't even guess. I can't let you.

CLARA (*laughing*). Oh, you'll feel better when you get it out of your system. Let's see—somebody engaged?

MAUDE (*putting hand over CLARA'S mouth*). Clara, don't; please don't. (*Looks R., fearfully.*)

CLARA (*holding MAUDE'S hands*). If I guess, will you tell me? Let me think—we were talking about Harold Wright.

MAUDE. Oh, Clara!

CLARA (*laughing*). So it is Harold. Well, let's see—he's been going a good deal lately with Mabel Sweetly—but of course he wouldn't—ever think of marrying her.

MAUDE (*hotly*). Well, I'd like to know why not. She's one of the dearest, loveliest girls I ever knew, and she'll make—oh, my! (*Puts hand over her own mouth.*)

CLARA (*laughing*). And she'll make him a devoted wife, you were going to say.

MAUDE. I wasn't—I wasn't!

CLARA. Well, no matter; the secret's out.

MAUDE. Clara Lewis, it isn't. It musn't be. I deny it. Remember, I deny it, absolutely. Oh, Clara, really there are very important reasons why nobody must know.

CLARA. Oh, I see.

MAUDE. So you won't breathe it to a soul, will you? I can't help it if you guessed it, can I?

CLARA. No, of course not. But Mabel—of all girls. Who would have thought it?

MAUDE. And I didn't tell, did I? You said they were engaged, and I denied it, didn't I?

CLARA. You certainly did. (*Laughs.*)

MAUDE. Well, let it stay that way. It's very important, Clara, very important, really. Are you coming in?

(*Exit MAUDE, R.*)

CLARA. Dear me, there seems to be quite a mystery about it. And Mabel Sweetly, of all girls. Well, I won't say anything, of course, because I promised I wouldn't. But I must find out something more about this right away. It looks juicy. Oh, here's Stella. (*Enter STELLA GARDNER, R.*) Hello, Stella. You aren't going already?

STELLA. Oh, I must. I ought to drop in at the Hudsons', and I'm going out to dinner. What a pretty gown!

CLARA. So glad you like it. What are they talking about in there? (*Motions R.*)

STELLA. Oh, nothing much. What do you know?

(*Draws on gloves.*)

CLARA. Oh, nothing I can tell.

STELLA (*looking up quickly*). What's that? Nothing you can tell? You'd tell me, wouldn't you? You know I'm safe as the grave. (*They go down L.*)

(*Enter DELIA, R., with tray of dishes.*)

CLARA. Oh, yes, dear, but it's a secret, a real secret, and I promised. Oh, you would be so surprised!

DELIA (*aside*). Saints preserve us! Here's two more av thim tellin' about it. And it's a secret—a real secret.

(*Puts tray on table.*)

STELLA (*to CLARA*). Oh, come on, be a sport. Tell me. I love surprises.

CLARA. Well! I know it's silly to be mysterious over a trifle like this—but a promise is a promise, and I never break a promise—that is, intentionally.

DELIA (*aside*). And I never break a cup or saucer intentionally.

CLARA. And besides—if—if—two people are engaged it's perfectly silly of them not to tell, isn't it?

DELIA (*aside*). She'll die if she doesn't tell it.

(*Takes up tray, and exits, L.*)

STELLA. Engaged! Who's engaged? Why, Clara, when did it happen? So you are engaged, are you?

CLARA. Oh, no, not I. Now, don't press me to tell other people's secrets, because I won't.

STELLA. If you don't tell me the truth I'll think you are hiding something from me—and—I'll never, never forgive you. (*Handkerchief to eyes.*)

CLARA. Now, Stella Gardiner, don't be silly, and don't cry about it. I'm not engaged.

STELLA. But you are—you're keeping something from me, anyway.

CLARA (*impatiently*). Look here, this is not my secret. It was fairly forced on me. I don't see why I should keep a secret that's fairly forced on me, do you?

STELLA. No, certainly not.

CLARA. And when two people have been seen together on the street every day for the past month, and out driving, and all ——

STELLA. Driving? You don't mean Harold and Mabel? I saw them yesterday. You don't mean it!

CLARA. Yes, I do. Isn't it astonishing?

STELLA. Well—of—all—things! She's welcome to him. I'm going right back and congratulate her before them all. (*Goes R.*)

CLARA. Oh, mercy, no. They'll say I told you. But I didn't tell, really, did I?

STELLA. Of course not. I guessed it. Anyway, I thought something was up yesterday when I saw them. Well, did you ever! The sly little thing. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. I really must go in and see how she looks over it.

CLARA. Probably like the cat after he swallowed the canary. Come on. I'll go in with you. Now don't you—say—one—word! Mind! Promise!

STELLA (*laughing*). Oh, I promise.

(*Exeunt, R.*)

(*Enter DELIA, L. She looks off*)

DELIA. I'll bet they were talkin' about Miss Mary's engagement. An' there's Miss Mary woul' hear about it, an' nobody tellin' her. Sure, it's meself can kape a secret when it's a rale secret. But when half the town's talkin'—— (*Goes R. suddenly.*) There's Miss Mary, right be the dure. (*Calls off R. in loud whisper.*) Miss Mary! Miss Mary, dear.

(*Enter MARY, R.*)

MARY. Mercy, Delia, what's the matter? Is the cake all gone, or what?

(*DELIA looks all around, and draws MARY mysteriously down C.*)

DELIA. Whisht! Miss Mary—there's somethin' goin' on here to-day!

MARY. Well, I should say so, Delia. You are. I never saw you go on so. What is it—quick!

DELIA. Miss Mary, you could chop me in pieces before I'd blab a secret, but when it's every one a-talkin' about it, and the dear child herself in there (*motioning R.*) so innocent like, never suspectin'—

MARY (*nervously*). Delia, you'll drive me crazy. What are you talking about? What dear child?

DELIA. Oh, ma'am, when ye only overhear things is it right——? If it isn't right to tell it, I wouldn't do it for a thousand dollars.

MARY (*with dignity*). You can surely tell me, Delia, and I will decide what is best to be done about it. Come!

DELIA. Oh, Miss Mary, nothin' can't be done about anythin'. They're engaged, that's all! And she's in there this blessed minute! (*Points dramatically, R.*)

MARY. Dear me, Delia—engaged! Who? Who?

DELIA. Och, sure I don't know whether Miss Mabel would forgive me for tellin'. But she's got a grand young man, Miss Mary, in Mr. Wright—she has so. I wouldn't say a word away for anything, bless their hearts, if you would but let my tongue out.

MARY (*surprised*). Mabel and Harold engaged! Delia, are you sure?

DELIA. Sure! I heard her say it herself wid her own mouth in this very room not ten minutes gone. I thought you might know. But it's a secret, Miss Mary. Swear be that ye'll never breathe a word av it—won't ye, now?

MARY. Why, of course, Delia. And you mustn't tell any one else.

DELIA. Do I look like a girl as would tell other people's secrets, mum?

MARY. No, Delia; I know you never do. But you did perfectly right to come to me. Now hurry with the cakes, won't you?

DELIA. Yis, mum.

(*Exit, L.*)

MARY (*down L.*). Well, this is news! And to think I can't say a word. Why, Delia overheard it. (*Loud burst*

of laughter heard off R.) I wouldn't be surprised if they all know it by now.

(*Enter HAZEL BROWN, R.*)

HAZEL (*calling*). Mary, where are you? Ah, there you are. We need some more cakes.

MARY (*solemnly*). I know. I've sent Delia. What are they laughing about in there?

HAZEL. Why, about Mabel!

MARY (*tragically*). Hazel Brown, do you mean to tell me Mabel Sweetly announced her engagement—and I wasn't there to hear it?

HAZEL (*coming down L.*). Announced—her—engagement! (*Surprised.*) What do you mean? Stella was trying to tease her about Harold Wright, that's all; and every one knows she doesn't care a snap of her —

MARY (*meaningly*). Oh, doesn't she?

HAZEL. Mary Morton, I believe you know something.

MARY. I do, but I won't tell.

HAZEL. Oh, please, please.

MARY. Never. I promised.

HAZEL. You just wait. (*HAZEL runs out R., and returns in a moment with NELLIE ATHERTON, JESSIE COOPER and MARION CARR.*) Now, girls, make her tell—make her tell.

JESSIE. Make her tell what? Ith it thomething real in-tereththing?

HAZEL. Girls—she knows something about Mabel Sweetly, and she's just dying to tell it. So now let's give her the chance.

ALL. Yes, tell it, Mary. Please. Come on, now. Mabel won't care.

MARY. Oh, dear—oh, dear. Well (*looking off R.*), I believe several others know it, anyway. Come here, girls. (*She gathers them close around her, and speaks in a low, impressive voice.*) Mabel is engaged to Harold Wright! There!

MARION. Oh, are you sure?

MARY. Perfectly certain—but, girls, it's a secret. Now, don't go and tell any one. For once in your lives show that a woman can keep a secret.

ALL. You bet we will! Oh, Mary, is it true? etc.

JESSIE (*ecstatically*). Oh, I knew it! I knew it! It'n't it exthiting? I thimply mutht congratulate her. (*Goes R.*)

HAZEL. Wait! She won't mind a bit, Mary. We'll all go in and surround her, and march her out here. Come on.

(HAZEL, MARION, JESSIE *and* NELLIE *rush out R.*)

MARY. Oh, now I've done it! Now I've done it! But it was bound to get out, anyway.

(*Enter MARION, JESSIE and NELLIE in a mock wedding procession, and loudly humming the wedding march. HAZEL follows with MABEL on her arm. MABEL is laughing and protesting.*)

MABEL. Hazel Brown, you're crazy. What does all this mean?

(*Enter, immediately after MABEL, STELLA, CLARA and MAUDE. STELLA and CLARA go down R. MAUDE remains up R. C. HAZEL is up C. MABEL is up L. C. The others are L.*)

MARY (*going to MABEL and kissing her*). Oh, Mabel, I'm so sorry—I mean I'm so glad, dear.

STELLA } (*looking at each other*). Glad! Glad of
CLARA } what?

HAZEL (*dramatically*). Allow me, ladies, to present Mrs. Harold Wright!

MABEL. Oh!

(*She covers her face and sinks into chair.*)

NELLIE. She's engaged, girls, she's engaged. Make her admit it!

JESSIE. Oh, Mabel, do confeth it, dear.

MABEL. Oh, girls, how can I? Why, how on earth could such a story get out about me? (*Begins to cry.*) I never told a living soul—except—except—(*she looks across at MAUDE with sudden indignation*) Maude!

MAUDE (*rushing across and throwing herself on her knees beside MABEL*). Oh, Mabel, you know I never really told—I couldn't after I promised. Please believe me. Say you forgive me.

(MABEL rises and releases herself from MAUDE'S grasp.)

MABEL (*coldly*). There, that will do, Maude. Let's not have a scene, please. (*About to go L.*)

MAUDE (*burying her face in the chair*). Oh, she'll never forgive me!

MARY. Why, Mabel, it wasn't Maude's fault. (*Enter DELIA, L.*) I told the girls, but Maude didn't tell me.

MABEL (*haughtily*). Then who did, pray?

DELIA. I did, Miss Mabel.

MABEL (*surprised*). You, Delia?

DELIA. Yis, mum. I heard ye tellin' Miss Maude.

MABEL. Delia!

DELIA. Yis, an' right glad I was to hear the news, mum. He's a fine gentleman.

MABEL (*trying to stop her*). Oh, Delia, you must be mistaken.

DELIA. I am not, Miss Mabel, and here's my best wishes to ye; an' I also heard Miss Clara tellin' Miss Stella.

(STELLA and CLARA shriek, and MAUDE looks up.)

MABEL (*haughtily*). Well, really, there seems to have been quite enough discussion of my affairs here this afternoon. I won't add to it. Good-bye, Mary. (*Goes L. Telephone rings off R. Exit DELIA, R.*) May I ask you girls not to repeat this story? You mustn't tell any one. It means a great deal to me. I —

(*Enter DELIA, R.*)

DELIA (*excitedly*). Ye're wanted on the 'phone, Miss Mabel.

MABEL. Oh, I wonder who it can be? Excuse me.

(*Exit, R.*)

JESSIE. Well, what I want to know ith—ith Mabel engaged to Harold Wright, or not?

DELIA. Excuse me bein' so forward, Miss Mary—but that's him now! (*Motions R.*)

MARION. What! Was it Harold who called her?

(DELIA nods.)

NELLIE. Oh, it's awful to say—but I'd give one hundred dollars to know what they are talking about.

MAUDE. Whether it's true or not she'll never forgive me.

(*Enter MABEL, R., smiling. She raises MAUDE, kisses her, and stands with arm around her.*)

MABEL. Yes, I will, too. Girls, listen. I'm engaged to Harold Wright. (*They all exclaim and shriek and start toward her, but she stops them with a gesture.*) Wait! Harold did not want to announce it until he had told his Uncle George, who, as you know, has been like a father to him.

CLARA. And his uncle's in Europe.

MABEL. He was. But, girls—he came home unexpectedly to-day, and Harold has seen him, and it's all right!

MAUDE. Oh, Mabel!

MABEL. So you may tell any one now, girls. It's no secret. And—wait—what do you think that mean old thing said to me?

MARY. What?

MABEL. Why, he said he telephoned me here right away to relieve the strain—because he knew how a woman keeps a secret! (*They all laugh.*) And now come on, congratulate me, won't you?

(*They all rush to MABEL, surrounding her and talking excitedly.*)

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WILL BE SENT FREE ON REQUEST

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